

2009

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### Recommended Citation

Halpin, Kimberly (2009) "Roommate Rants: Understanding Roommate Conflicts among MSU Students," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato*: Vol. 9, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56816/2378-6949.1056>

Available at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol9/iss1/3>

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Roommate Rants:  
Understanding Roommate Conflicts among MSU Students

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**ABSTRACT**

Roommates seem to go hand in hand with the college experience. Conflicts are inevitable in life and when a pair or small group of college students live together, conflict is likely to occur. The purpose of this study was to find out what conflicts roommates experience, how they communicate those conflicts, and how they resolve those conflicts. All conflicts would involve a Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) student and their roommate(s). An online survey, consisting of twenty questions, was created and administered to Dr. Kristen Treinen's SPEE 100: Fundamentals of Speech Communication class; twenty out of 750 students responded. The results indicate that there was a variety of problems among the roommates, which were linked to various factors such as the number of roommates living together, first impressions, and the roommates' comfort or ability to bring up major or minor issues with their roommates, as well as other factors.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Problem Statement***

A former roommate of mine once told me that, "the best roommate is one you never see". But what do you do when you run into conflict with your roommate? Knapp, Marek, & Wanzer (2004) stated, "It has been shown that a student's relationship with his/her roommate has a significant impact on the student's college experience, particularly for first year students" (p.211). Communication between roommates is extremely important when trying to prevent, deal with, or top conflicts.

Most college students live with roommates. In fact, for many, it is their first time living with a roommate. The problem is that students may not know how to communicate problems to their roommates in an effective way or how to come up with a solution. By researching these issues, common roommate conflicts and communication problems that MSU students experience will be discussed. This could help current and future roommates deal with the various problems they encounter. The research findings will be unique due to the particular population being researched and the time of the study and will therefore add to existing research on roommate conflicts.

### ***Brief History***

According to Duran & Zakahi (1988), “research indicates poor relationships with roommates are responsible for dissatisfaction with school and lower GPA” (p. 136). By studying conflicts that roommates have, we can start to provide solutions. That way, students will know how to express their displeasures and keep their grades from falling. If students are at peace in their home, that is sure to help them feel better about their school life.

Hardigg & Nobile (1995) state, “In extreme cases, roommate conflict can lead to serious violence, as it did at Harvard last spring: One student killed her roommate before committing suicide” (p. 90). If roommate conflicts can lead to death, then I do not believe this topic has been examined thoroughly. Most students entering college do not have much experience living with strangers. If there is a problem between roommates and neither can work it out, they may start to feel desperate, trapped, and turn the matter into a life or death situation.

Abramovitch (1997) offers a different perspective, “Perhaps not surprisingly, colleges have found that race is a frequent cause of friction between roommates” (p. 38). Living with a person from another culture could be one of the hardest parts of sharing a living space with him/her and the main cause of conflict between roommates. Young college students may not be exposed to a lot of diversity until they get their first roommate in college. Being able to communicate and interact with people from a diverse background is important to maintaining positive relations as roommates.

### ***Research Questions***

The purpose of this research was to understand the following:

- Research Question #1: What problems do roommates encounter with each other?
- Research Question #2: How do the roommates communicate those problems?
- Research Question #3: What solutions, if any, do roommates implement to solve their problems?
- Research Question #4: How do the roommates communicate those solutions with each other?
- Research Question #5: Why do some roommates, if any, avoid communication with their roommates when it comes to conflict?

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## ***Overview***

There were a handful of resources on roommate conflicts and solutions. Many mentioned how various American colleges and universities pair dorm mates together. Some articles focused on specific and detailed problems roommates have. Some articles offered helpful tips on how to live with someone. Others focused on particular communication styles or personality traits and studied how those influenced the subjects' relationship with their roommates. When talking about roommate conflicts, information on how people obtain roommates as freshman and certain processes that might help to decrease the risk of conflict between roommates was incorporated.

## ***Freshmen Selecting Roommates through Facebook***

Facebook has become new way for incoming freshman to find their own roommates, someone they think they will get along with or have something in common with such as music taste, major, hometown, personality, interests, or even religious views. "At Widener University, nearly a third of freshmen [chose to have] a roommate. More and more students, once they know it's an option, want to," said Catherine Bermudex, assistant dean for residence life at Widner University (Snyder, 2008, Sept. 7, p. A01). On the contrary, "Often, randomly selected roommates work better than those who were good friends in high school" (Let's Talk., 1994, May, p. 12). A downside to choosing roommates based on Facebook is that a person's online personality does not always match their everyday self.

## ***Matching Roommates through Questionnaires***

In the words of Johnson (2008) on the process of finding a roommate, "I remember being thrilled when I got a "roommate questionnaire" in the mail before my freshman year of college. I figured that meant college officials were going to match me up with someone exactly like me!" Some universities are still using surveys. For instance, an in-depth survey for incoming freshman to take will help residence life directors match roommates together. "Richmond used to rely on Scantron forms [(housing applications)] to match roommates". Later, [Richmond used] "an open-ended question [that] asked, basically, what are you looking for?" "Different

college forms feature multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blanks, and 10-point, self-rated scales of modesty and humor” (Lipka, 2008, Sept. 12, p. A1).

### ***Matching Roommates based on Compatible Personality Test Results***

Other college campuses are using a similar approach by offering personality tests to students looking for roommates in hopes of preventing problems. “At the University of Texas at Austin, housing officials have devised a Web-based system that asks students about smoking, sleeping, exercise and study habits, music, frequency of visitors, interests in fraternities, and computer use.” The article goes on to say that Davidson College in Davidson, N.C. chose to match roommates based on the results of a Myers-Briggs personality type test “and put complementary types together” (Clayton, 2001, Aug. 28, p. 14).

### ***Roommates Sign Contracts***

In an effort to prevent freshmen roommates from having unnecessary arguments with each other, Wilson College for women has the women sign a contract which “spells out living arrangements dealing with study time, the kinds of music that can be played and what items can be borrowed from the other person.” The article goes on to say that for “the 150 women who live on campus [and] have roommates with very little in common..., the contracts help each student recognize her idiosyncrasies” (AP, 1986, Oct. 16, p. 9). People that live with roommates and have nothing in common with them seem to learn things about themselves that they never knew. Other schools such as Moore College of Art and Design, a woman’s school in Philadelphia, have the new freshman “draft contracts called “The Fine Art of Living Together”” (Snyder, 2008, Sept. 7, p. A01). When roommates are creating contracts, it is important for them to keep the following in mind, “In the best-case scenarios, roommates will find common ground and then stick to their shared standards. You both have to live there, so you should both be confident there. Decide early on what’s OK and what’s not then stick to it” (Lay, 2006, Feb., p. 54).

### ***New Roommate Requests Decrease***

“The university’s [St. Louis University] director of housing, Frankie Minor, says the students he puts together on the basis of the [personality] test do seem to get along better than those selected at random.” The

article goes on to say that, “[the personality tests] had cut the number of requests for room changes in half” (Bixler, 1993, Nov. 7, p. ED7). “The University of Nevada at Las Vegas has developed an elaborate questionnaire to gauge roommate compatibility. Instead of asking obvious questions, UNLV’s form solicits reactions to a series of scenarios.” The article continues to say that, “After the university began to use this approach five years ago, requests for roommate switches dropped by 50 percent, and they have remained quite low” (Hardigg & Nobile, 1995, Sept. 25, p. 90). On the contrary, “At Northeastern, the number of freshmen requesting a specific roommate for this fall jumped 22 percent over last year to 343, out of an entering class of 2,800” (Bombardieri, 2007, June 2, p. A1).

## **METHOD**

### ***Survey***

To obtain data on roommate conflicts, a twenty-question survey was created using [www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com).-see [Appendix B](#). Questions were developed that pertain to the participants, their roommates, and conflict. Seventeen of the questions were yes/no and multiple choice while the other three questions were open-ended and asked the participant to explain their answers. A survey was the easiest and most convenient way to get answers to the research questions. To learn what conflicts roommates are having with each other in this particular study, a survey was the best method to use because the participants were able to take their time and think about their responses. It would not have been feasible to make observations or hold a focus group or private interview sessions due to time and differing schedules.

### ***Population***

The sample consisted of Dr. Kristen Treinen’s class, SPEE 100: Fundamentals of Speech Communication and was actually suggested by Dr. Daniel Cronn-Mills, a speech professor and chair of the Speech Communication Department of MSU. Dr. Treinen is an Associate Professor and Basic Course Director of the Department of Speech Communication of MSU. This sample was chosen for several reasons: with the class being a required course for several majors, more people were likely to respond, people from a variety of

majors and not just speech communication majors. It was also a lower level class consisting of 750 students, mostly freshman. A high return rate was expected since the survey was available to such a large number of people all at once.

## **PROCEDURES**

### *Data collection*

Once my professor approved my proposal and IRB forms-see [Appendix A](#), I emailed Dr. Treinen the survey link along with the consent letter-see [Appendix C](#). She then had her teaching assistants post the email on the “Desire to Learn” website for her class to volunteer to participate. The participants had 26 days to take the survey. Once the survey closed, I reviewed and analyzed the responses. During those 26 days, 26 people viewed it and 20 people completed the survey (that means that 77% of the people who viewed the survey chose to take it, overall there was a 3% return rate out of 750 people). All participants answered questions #1-#16 and #20.

## **RESULTS**

### *Participants*

Seventy percent were female. Seventy percent were freshman, with twenty five percent sophomores and five percent juniors. Eighty-five percent lived with one roommate, the rest with three roommates. Fifty-five percent of the respondents had been living with their current roommates for 3-6 months, and the other half for 6-9 months. Eighty-five percent lived in dorms while the other respondents lived in an apartment, a town home and a house, respectively. All females lived with just females and the males with just males.

### *Questions dealing with conflict*

Only one participant had taken a class on conflict management. Eighty-five percent tended to avoid conflicts in general. Eighty percent said they felt comfortable approaching their roommate with a problem they had with him/her. Sixty percent did not think minor, temporary or unsolvable issues were worth bringing up. Sixty-seven percent actually talked with their roommates about a problem. Forty-seven percent first waited to



see if the problem continued and then they spoke up while 16% said nothing and the problem worsened. One person said something right away, but the problem continued. Two others waited a day and a week, respectively, and only one respondent waited at least a whole month before he said something. Forty-seven percent resolved their problems. Fifty-five percent would rather live with a roommate than live alone. Students who did not have any conflicts with their roommates said so in the “other” option. Since those students did not have any issues with their roommate, they either said they do not talk to their roommates about them or just left that answer blank. I am assuming that those particular students chose not to answer questions #17- #19 as well, since the return rate on those questions was 90%, 95%, and 85%, respectively.

### ***First Impressions***

To organize the seemingly blunt and honest responses to question #10, I divided them first by male and female responses and then by what I thought were positive and negative impressions. By that method of organization, I was able to see some similarities and differences more clearly.

When looking at the positive female responses, there were a total of twelve. For example, I perceived the following as a positive first impression, “I have known her for a long time so I was nervous we wouldn’t get along. We got along fine and will be living together again next year.” Most of the positive female impressions included words such as: “friendly”, “laid back”, “fun”, “nice”, “happy”, “funny”, “spunky”, and “someone I would get along with.” For the negative female responses, one stood out, “stuck up, preppy, skinny bitch”.

When looking at positive male responses, there were a total of three. For example, I perceived the following as a positive first impression, “...this is a big step for him coming from a small town to a large school.” Most of the positive male impressions included words such as “cool” and “a good guy”. For the negative male responses, there were just two that really stood out, “rough and tough” and “messy, lazy, dirty, stinky, video gamer, partiers”. Two of the phrases used by male respondents to describe their male roommates that I couldn’t determine as positive or negative, but thought were interesting word choices nonetheless, were “very metrosexual” and “very feminine”.

### ***RQ1: What problems do roommates encounter with each other?***

### ***Top Five***

In order for participants to answer this question, I listed all the possible reasons why roommates might have issues with each other based on my personal experiences, observations and imagination. The top five issues that were involved in conflicts between the participants and their roommates are as follows:

1. Cleaning up messes/trash-this was a problem for 47% of the respondents.
2. Communication-this was a problem for 41% of the respondents.
3. Guests-this was a problem for 35% of the respondents.
4. Parties, personal property, volume/noise and dirty dishes-these were all problems for 29% of the respondents.
5. Taking out the trash, clutter, sharing belongings and food-these were all problems for 24% of the respondents.

### ***Bottom Half***

The following issues were involved in roommate conflicts 18% of the time or less: drinking, paying bills, temperature, lighting, parking, personal hygiene, odors, stealing, door locks, laundry, privacy, furniture, shower/bathroom, other roommates' drama, extreme personality differences, lifestyles, drugs, and smoking. I was surprised that none of the problems involved snoring, especially for subjects living in the dorms.

### ***RQ2: How do they communicate those problems?***

Ten participants expressed positive communication in response to the problems they had. Examples where a solution was achieved include

- “we are a lot alike so our messiness, which is our big problem, is never really a problem”
- “we always have a friendly discussion, and problems are always resolved”
- “it went good. We were annoyed at each other at first but then realized that we need to listen to each other because that is the only way we are going to get anywhere”

- “just told him he needed to start cleaning up after himself because our room isn’t big enough to have stuff laying around”

Only two participants expressed negative communication in response to the problems they had. Examples of those situations when solutions were not achieved include: “we tried to have a group meeting discussing our pet peeves and such, but nothing really has changed...I still feel frustrated with the results and feel like it will never be resolved” and “doesn’t really get resolved and starts a fight.”

***RQ3: What solutions, if any do roommates implement to solve their problems?***

***RQ4: How do they communicate those solutions with each other?***

Eight cases involved solutions between the roommates. Some responses involving those particular cases were “we always talk about stuff, instead of argue”, “we just bring it up almost as a joke and we get the point if something is bothering each other”, “just to work together and communicate more”, “we just worked out how if there was something I didn’t like he would pick something out that he didn’t like so I would fix that.” There were two cases where solutions were not reached. As one participant said, “some people are just too used to getting things done for them and responsible roommates make for a good fill in for parents, sadly.” Another stated, “We tried and it wasn’t solved”.

***RQ5: Why do some roommates, if any, avoid communication with their roommates when it comes to conflicts?***

I believe there were several reasons why a respondent chose not to express their frustrations with their roommates. For one thing, having roommates is usually a temporary situation. Making the best of things and keeping the peace may have been the best solution they could think of. On the other hand, some people know they have a right to say something, but may not know what the best or nicest way would be to bring up an issue they have with their roommate. Maybe some of the participants were afraid to speak up and complain because they were afraid of seeming like a nag or control freak. Others may have just been so accepting of their roommate’s faults or differences because they understand that their faults or differences may be slightly irritating to their roommate, who has since remained quiet. Still, some people want to be liked and by rocking

the boat, that may ruin their chances of being liked by their roommate. Maybe some people simply have a passive aggressive personality and are not one to be confrontational. Maybe some of the respondents who did not know their roommate before they lived with him/her and never sat down and got to know one another thought the idea of bringing up a negative issue may have been too awkward for him/her. The last reason I can think of, according to the data I gathered, was that a few of the lucky respondents did not experience any troubles with their roommates.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results indicated that roommates had some common problems. Cleanliness and communication are probably what separate good roommates from bad roommates. Most of the roommates had no problem mentioning their discomforts to the person they share a small space with. The roommates who started out as good friends already had a healthy, open line of communication and seemed to respect each other. Getting along and discussing issues did not seem to be a problem for the „friends“. The majority of respondents enjoyed having roommates and were able to learn to deal with problems as soon as they began and communicate the situations with their roommate. Even though the roommates experienced conflicts, most would room with them again.

### ***What did we learn from the results?***

The roommates admitted to dealing with a majority of the issues listed in question #16. First, a number of college students preferred a nice, clean environment and did not appreciate living with a dirty, messy slob. Second, college students had a problem with communicating effectively or the way they communicate problems to the students living with them. Third, roommates“ guests were a problem for various unknown reasons. Parties, personal property, volume/noise, dirty dishes, taking out the trash, clutter, sharing belongings and food were common problems for roommates, but they were not the most popular. As I predicted-see Appendix F, participants who tend to avoid conflict in general were more likely to hesitate (wait to see if the problem occurred more than once) before saying something to their roommate about a problem (or they would not say

anything at all) compared to respondents who did not avoid conflicts and would then be more likely to say something to their roommate immediately. Secondly, participants who lived with three roommates had more conflicts with their roommates than a respondent who lived with one roommate. Finally, participants who felt comfortable approaching their roommate with a problem they had about him or her, even if the problem was minor, temporary, or unsolvable were more likely to actually talk to their roommate about the problems they chose in question #16 compared to participants who were not comfortable and did not think certain kinds of issues were worth discussing.

## **LIMITATIONS**

### ***Method***

In order to get responses from subjects with more roommate experience, I should have sent the subjects the survey closer to the end of the semester rather than in the middle. I should have only had the survey available for no more than two weeks so I could gather results sooner. Instead of posting the survey link, I should have sent out a mass email to Dr. Treinen's class, thereby making the greeting and consent letter seem more personable; then I may have received a larger turnout.

In order to obtain more responses for a more variety of answers, I should have had Dr. Treinen offer her students an incentive to complete the survey, for example, five points of extra credit. Second, I should have underestimated the time it would have taken a subject to complete the survey; then I may have received a higher turnout. Third, by interviewing a resident advisor in the Gage dorms of MSU and holding a focus group with four or so students living in those dorms, I could have found out first hand what complaints students have about their roommates and how they resolve them. I could have also interviewed MSU's director of residential life and student housing to see how they pair up roommates.

### ***Survey***

I should have provided a concrete definition of what conflict was at the beginning of the survey just because conflict could mean different things to different people. Because question #16 had so many options and many of those options were general, there was most likely a lot of overlapping with the results. For example, “parties” could have also meant “guests”. I should have also combined questions #17 and #19 and deleted questions #3 and #9.

In order to gather more qualitative data to analyze, I should have asked more questions, especially open-ended questions such as Do you think it is better to live with someone you know or someone you do not know? Why? If your roommate had a problem with you, would you want him/her to tell you directly and right away, directly after a day or two, in a passive aggressive manner until you brought it up, or would you want him/her to keep his/her feelings to him/herself and learn to deal with it on his/her own? Why or why not? Describe a conflict you have experienced with your roommate that was resolved and one that was not resolved.

I should have included questions relating to demographics such as the participants’ ethnicity, age, and major. I should have also been more specific in the wording of some of my questions. For example, question #6 should have asked for the exact number of months lived together. When I had noise/volume as a conflict option, I should have also listed music, TV, and alarm clocks. I should have had roommate’s “bedroom activities” and cell phones as some of the conflict choices.

While there are a large number of additional questions I would have liked to ask the participants, I will only give you a few examples just to give you an idea of what could be beneficial on a future survey...How did you become roommates with your current roommate-were you assigned to each other or did you have a choice? Do you feel resentment towards your roommate because of a conflict you had with him/her or are having and have not said anything about it to him/her? On a scale from excellent to horrible (excellent, okay, neutral, poor, horrible), please rate your overall roommate experience.

I should have reworded question #7 in this way-when you moved in together with your current roommate, did you start out as strangers or friends? I should have also asked them what they believed

communication style was-passive aggressive, withdrawal, or confrontational aggressive, while giving a brief definition of each.

### ***Results***

I had a few mixed results that may have skewed the data. For example, some of the participants said they did not have a problem with their roommate and then checked one or more problems for question #16. A second example was when some said they did not talk to their roommates about the conflicts and then reported to have waited if the problem occurred again and then said something. Another example was when some participants reported minor, temporary, issues were not worth bringing up, but then had a huge list of complaints. A fourth example was the fact that not everyone answered every open-ended question so I was not able to use those participants' blank responses to determine common themes. A few first impressions were hard to determine as positive or negative so the theme involving impressions did not involve all responses. Some participants may have been in a rush while answering the survey questions so some of their responses may not be complete or truthful. It was also hard to interpret some responses when the participants had more than one roommate so it may have been better to use subjects living just in the dorms, however, with the other way, a wider variety of conflicts were likely.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research could expand on my study by doing the following: involve more participants, look at cultural differences that may have an impact on roommate conflicts, and include the additional questions I wished to ask.

### **CONCLUSION**

The data I collected took me in all sorts of directions. I focused on what the conflicts involved, why they may have occurred, and how to resolve them. Overall, communication between roommates is extremely important when trying to prevent, deal with, or stop conflicts. A person will not know how their roommate feels about something or if something is bugging him/her if he/she does not say anything directly to him/her about it, unless he/she drops major hints, which could easily backfire. Waiting a whole month to say something, once all

the resentment has built up, is not a good idea. As one participant stated, “Open communication and a good attitude is the best way to deal with situations.”

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## **APPENDICES**

### ***Appendix A***

The following list was some of my predictions about the results before I looked at them. I recorded the participant number that matched with each prediction and calculated the occurrence of each. To clarify, the first one would be read as follows, "If a respondent chooses yes for question number nineteen, then they will choose the roommate option for question number twenty. Participants numbers five, seven, etc. matched that prediction. Ten out of twenty subject's responses did not match either of my predictions for that set, so that particular prediction matched the results fifty percent of the time".

- if #19 yes → #20 roommate: 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15
- if #19 no → #20 alone: 3, 6, 9, 16
- neither prediction applied to 10 subjects=50% occurrence
- if #13/14 yes → #17 yes: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19
- if #13/14 no → #17 no: 3, 16, 20
- neither prediction applied to 6 subjects=70% occurrence
- if #12 yes → #17 no: 2, 3, 16
- if #12 no → #17 yes: 9, 18
- neither prediction applied to 15 subjects=25% occurrence
- if #10 ☺ → #20 roommate: 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17
- if #10 ☹ → #20 alone: 9
- neither prediction applied to 10 subjects=50% occurrence
- if #12 yes → #18 hesitant/none at all: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19
- if #12 no → #18 immediate: 9
- neither prediction applied to 5 subjects=75% occurrence
- if #14 yes → #16 many: 8, 9, 12, 16
- if #14 no → #16 few: 3, 7, 10, 13, 15
- neither prediction applied to 11 subjects=45% occurrence
- if #3 1 → #16 few: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 14, 15, 19
- if #3 3 → #16 many: 6, 9, 17
- neither prediction applied to 6 subjects=70% occurrence
- if #10 ☹ → #16 many: 9, 20
- if #10 ☺ → #16 few: 1, 2, 4, 5, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19
- neither prediction applied to 9 subjects=55% occurrence

Note: Not all results were used in all predictions due to neutral answers/answers that did not apply/blank responses. ☺/☹=positive/negative, #1=question number, : 1=participant number, →=then, few=less than 4, many=4/more, % occurrence=the percentage of the prediction occurring

## ***Appendix B***

When it comes to getting along with your roommate, I thought Langley (2008) of *Campus Life* said it best when she wrote the article that follows...

### **A Roommate Survival Guide**

*How to troubleshoot minor problems before they become major issues.*

No matter who your future living companion may be or what kind of living situation you find yourself in at college, be prepared to make some adjustments and compromises. I've found the following tips helpful in getting along with roommates of all types.

1. Be honest

It's inevitable: Sometimes roommates get on each other's nerves. That may be because you have different habits, or because you have different personalities. Too often I kept quiet about things my roommates did that bothered me. Looking back, I realize they probably had no clue those things annoyed me so much. If you aren't straightforward about what bothers you, you have no right to complain.

## 2. Choose your battles

On the other hand, if you grumble about every little incident, you will quickly be tuned out. It's important to make a genuine effort to be forgiving and flexible. Before you complain about an issue, ask yourself if it truly demands attention, or if it's something you can learn to bear. One of my roommates often left half-full cups from Burger King in the refrigerator for weeks. It annoyed me, but I never mentioned it to her. I just threw the cups away myself when the Coke had been flat for a few days. However, when money turned up missing from my desk drawer several times, I wasn't quick to place blame, but I did confront my roommates about it. After the confrontation, I didn't have any more problems with people borrowing cash without asking.

## 3. Bite your tongue

Sometimes, subtlety can solve a problem where harsh words would only inflame tempers. During my freshman year, I got annoyed when I realized I was the only one who ever took out the trash. So one day, I swallowed a mouthful of sarcastic comments and placed the sealed trash bag directly in the doorway between our room and the bathroom. After stepping over the garbage all day, my roommate took the hint and carried the bag to the dumpster. I likely could have achieved the same result by asking for help. Still, I'm glad I chose not to spew angry words rooted in irritation and impatience.

## 4. Find support

For those times when you're feeling roommate tension, you'll need a reliable, patient friend who can listen to your frustrations, offer advice and divert your attention. When I needed to get away from my room freshman year, I wandered next door for relief—the yearlong Yahtzee tournament with my suitemates was a big help. But if you have a serious issue that needs to be discussed, you may want to have a conversation with your resident assistant.

## 5. Be respectful

Perhaps your roommate hits the snooze button five times every morning. Resist the temptation to get even by blasting your music when you come in late at night. Returning respect for rudeness may not change anything, but then again, it might. One thing's for sure, though: Retaliation can only make matters worse.

## 6. Be willing to listen

Everyone has a story and a past, and sometimes issues run deeper than they seem. When I took time to listen to a roommate's difficult family situation, my sympathy and patience for her increased.

## 8. Keep a healthy distance

Everyone needs space, so make sure you each have time away from each other. My suitemates were good friends and both on the basketball team, so they saw a lot of each other. But because of their different majors, they had separate friends and study groups, which gave them much-needed time apart.

9. Be flexible

You might get the urge to stay up late and watch a movie when your roommate has a big test the next morning. But living with another person means you both have to make some compromises to accommodate each other.

10. Keep your sense of humor

This may be the most important tip of all. In any college living situation, crazy things happen. You're setting yourself up for a rough year if you let every little incident get to you. So let matters roll off your shoulders instead of dwelling on them, and laugh off the little things. Remember, events that seem like a big deal now will be great stories later.

11. Learn from the experience

Whomever your future roommate turns out to be—whether you become the best of friends or whether you decide you'd rather retake the SAT 100 times than live with him or her again—remember that ... your rooming situation ...[can] teach you valuable lessons....

Note: #7 and parts of #11 were omitted on purpose because they contained religion-specific words.

*Appendix C*

**1. Are you a male or female?**

Male	6	30%
Female	14	70%
20	100%	

**2. What year are you in college?**

Freshman	14	70%
Sophomore	5	25%
Junior	1	5%
Senior	0	0%
Graduate	0	0%
20	100%	

**3. How many roommates do you currently live with?**

0	0	0%
1	17	85%
2	0	0%
3	3	15%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
More than 5	0	0%
20	100%	

**4. How many of your roommates are female?**

0	6	30%
1	12	60%
2	0	0%
3	2	10%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
More than 5	0	0%
20	100%	

**5. How many of your roommates are male?**

0	14	70%
1	5	25%
2	0	0%
3	1	5%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
More than 5	0	0%
20	100%	

#### 6. How long have you lived with your current roommate(s)?

0-3 months	0	0%
3-6 months	11	55%
6-9 months	9	45%
9-12 months	0	0%
approximately 1.5 years	0	0%
approximately 2 years	0	0%
More than 2 years	0	0%
20	100%	

#### 7. My current roommate(s) is/are a/an...(check all that apply)

Stranger	5	25%
Acquaintance	5	25%
Friend	17	85%
Sibling	0	0%
Relative	0	0%
Co-Worker	0	0%
Significant Other	0	0%
Other, please specify: "Met her for first time on Move in day"	1	5%

#### 8. What do you and your roommate(s) live in?

Dorm	17	85%
Apartment	1	5%
Townhouse	1	5%
House	1	5%
Other, please specify	0	0%
	20	100%

**9.** Is your current roommate(s) a student, employed, both, or neither? Please check all that apply.

1 or more is a student	14	70%
1 or more is employed	0	0%
1 or more is both a student and employed	7	35%
1 or more is neither a student or employed	0	0%

**11.** Have you ever taken a class in conflict management?

Yes	1	5%
No	19	95%
	20	100%

**12.** Do you try to avoid conflicts in general?

Yes	17	85%
No	3	15%
	20	100%

**13.** Do you feel comfortable approaching your roommate(s) with a complaint you have about him/her/them?

Yes	16	80%
No	4	20%
	20	100%

**14.** Do you think minor/temporary/unsolvable issues are worth bringing up?

Yes	8	40%
No	12	60%
	20	100%

**15.** Have you ever had a problem(s) with your roommate(s)?

Yes	12	60%
No	8	40%
	20	100%

**16.** What did the problem(s) involve? Please check all that apply.

communication	7	41%
drugs	2	12%
smoking	1	6%
drinking	3	18%
parties	5	29%
paying bills	2	12%
temperature	3	18%
lighting	2	12%
taking out the trash	4	24%
parking	1	6%
guests	6	35%
personal hygiene	1	6%
odors	1	6%
pets	0	0%
clutter	4	24%
cleaning up messes/trash	8	47%
sharing belongings	4	24%
stealing	2	12%
personal property	5	29%
door locks	1	6%
windows	0	0%
snoring	0	0%
volume/noise	5	29%



language	0	0%
lease agreements	0	0%
moving in/out	0	0%
security deposits	0	0%
dirty dishes	5	29%
laundry	1	6%
food	4	24%
space	0	0%
common areas	0	0%
privacy	1	6%
furniture	1	6%
shower/bathroom	2	12%
other roommates' drama	3	18%
extreme personality differences	1	6%
illnesses	0	0%
disabilities	0	0%
lifestyles	3	18%
utilities	1	6%
appliances	1	6%
money	1	6%
abuse	0	0%
personal habits/idiosyncrasies	2	12%
routines/schedules	2	12%
Other, please specify:		
“No conflict” “Disrespect”		
“cellphone going off at night”	4	24%
“talks on phone all hours of		

night”

**17.** Did you talk to your roommate(s) about any of the problems you experienced? If yes, how did it go? If no, why not?

Yes	12	67%
No	6	33%
	18	100%

**18.** How long did it take you to say something about the problem(s) to your roommate(s)?

I did not say anything and the problem became worse	3	16%
I first waited to see if the problem continued, if it did I said something	9	47%
I said something right away and the problem stopped	0	0%
I said something right away, but the problem continued	1	5%
I waited a day	1	5%
I waited a week	1	5%
I waited more than one week	0	0%
I waited more than a month	1	5%
Other, please specify: “once again there was no problem!!!” “I haven't had any problems” “I haven't said anything and the	3	16%

behaviors haven't [stopped]"	
19	100%

**19.** Did you and your roommate(s) compromise/come to a solution to the problem(s)? If yes, please describe.

Yes	8	47%
No	9	53%
17	100%	

**20.** Would you rather live with a roommate or live alone?

Live with a roommate	11	55%
Live alone	9	45%
20	100%	

**Appendix D**

10. What were your first impressions of your roommate(s)?

#	Response
1	that she looked friendly and someone i would get along with
2	none she is my friend
3	My first impression of him was that he was very metrosexual and that this is a big step for him coming from a small town to a large school.
4	that she is a laid back easy to get along with person.. i knew that living with her would be a lot of fun and that we would get along great!!
5	I loved her! She was very happy and spunky!
6	That i got along well with them, and i they were all my friends and i was excited to live with them
7	That he was very feminine.
8	Nice, kind of shy at first
9	Messy, lazy, dirty, stinky, video gamer. partiers
10	I have known her for a long time so I was nervous we wouldn't get along. We get along fine and will be living together again next year.
11	Rough and tough but he was really friendly

12	She was very different from the people I hung out with, but she was really nice.
13	hes a cool guy. one of my good friends.
14	Friendly and open-minded
15	A mirror image of me
16	She seemed really nice off the bat. She was really funny and laid back like myself.
17	I thought they all would be easy to get a long with and fun.
18	A good Guy
19	Fun, loving person. very carefree
20	Stuck up, preppy, skinny bitch

17. Did you talk to your roommate(s) about any of the problems you experienced? If yes, how did it go? If no, why not?

#	Response
1	we haven't had any problems
2	We have never had any altercations. We are a lot alike so our messiness, which is our big problem, is never really a problem!
3	we tried to have a group meeting discussing our pet peeves and such, but nothing really has changed...i still feel frustrated with the results and feel like it will never be resolved
4	Just told him he needed to start cleaning up after himself because our room isn't big enough to have stuff laying around.
5	We're good friends, so it was easy to tell her
6	They did it once and never again, or very rarely
7	We always have a friendly discussion, and problems are always resolved.
8	went fine, very understanding
9	Problem was solved once brought up
10	it went good. we were annoyed at each other at first but then realized that we need to listen to each other because that is the only way we are going to get anywhere.
11	Doesn't really get resolved and starts a fight.
12	it worked out eventually
13	we got over it.

19. Did you and your roommate(s) compromise/come to a solution to the problem(s)? If yes, please describe.

#	Response
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1	We always talk about stuff, instead of argue. Open communication and a good attitude is the best way to deal with situations.
2	like i said, we tried, and it wasnt solved
3	He started cleaning up after himself more.
4	We just bring it up almost as a joke and we get the point if something is bothering each other.
5	Some people are just too used to getting things done for them and responsible roommates make for a good fill in for parents, sadly
6	Just to work together and communicate more.
7	yes. said when im doing something, no loud music.
8	We just try to talk about everything
9	we just worked out how if there was something i didnt like he would pick something out that he didnt like so i would fix that
10	she didn't do it again
11	didn't talk about it

Note: For question 10, the number equaled the participant number because all participants answered that question; for questions 17 and 19, the number did not equal the participant number because not all participants answered those questions.